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SUBJECT: SHIA INDEPENDENT STILL FEARS SUNNI PERSECUTION

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) In a March 5 introductory meeting with PolOffs, Shia Coalition Independent and re-elected Council of Representatives member Shaikh Khalid Abathar Atiyyah said that security for Iraq can only be attained through "inclusion" of the Shia. Atiyyah expressed his concern about the fear among the Shia that the US has "abandoned" them in support of the Sunnis. In particular, he said many Shia believe that the US is manipulating the security ministries away from the Shia, leaving them exposed to Sunni persecution. PolOff reminded Atiyyah that the parties who won seats in the December elections will negotiate among themselves who will be Ministers of Interior and Defense. PolOff assured Atiyyah that the US wants Iraqi parties to form an inclusive, competent government with credible security ministries that will protect Iraqis regardless of sect.

12. (C) Atiyyah told PolOffs that the Shia Coalition Independent bloc had decided to establish a National Committee of Independents made up of representatives from all 18 governorates. The Committee members will be from all walks of life but will have in common their loyalty to the marja'iyah and a commitment to serve Iraq. Atiyyah expects that Hussein al-Shahrastani will be the Committee leader.

13. (C) COMMENT: On one level, Atiyyah's professed concern over the need for Shia "inclusion" in the MOI comes across as the rhetoric of a sectarian Iraqi politician with government formation talks in mind. However, his comments echo the views of many Shia who express fears of a "return of the Ba'athists" and sometimes, incredibly, of USG readiness to see such a scenario come about. While such fears may seem irrational, they reflect the reality of a Shia population still traumatized by decades of totalitarian oppression (for Atiyyah's own story, see below.) As part of our effort to promote a government of national unity, we must continue to underscore our commitment to the principle that the Ba'athist era is gone for good.

14. (C) BIONOTE: In 1966, Shaikh Khalid Abathar Atiyyah entered Islamic seminary. He said that in 1970 he formed good relations with the Dawa party. Because of his close affiliation to Dawa, Atiyyah was arrested in 1972, 1975 and 11977. He said he was persecuted until his escape to Cairo in 11979. In Cairo he earned a masters degree and doctorate in Arabic literature. In 1985, he left Cairo for Iran where he became a university professor and an author. Atiyyah spent time in Lebanon and traveled to Brazil with an Islamic Missionary group. From 2000-2003 he moved to England to

study at Oxford. Although he claims to follow the teachings of Moqtada al-Sadr's late father, Ayatollah Mohamed Sadiq al-Sadr, Atiyyah noted that he is an Independent in the Shia Coalition.

KHALILZAD